Virtual Ideology

Using Online Quizzes to Help Students Develop Personal Political Values

Developing a political ideology is not an easy task, and it is usually not the most important goal for a student. Many students believe political awareness is an adult concern. Students who have these feelings often are unaware of their personal beliefs. Many accept their parents and/or close relatives' views as their own, often without giving any real thought to the issue. This process often concludes in students labeling themselves as following a specific political party, while completely supporting views of another political party. This is a major concern for social studies teachers, because in its curriculum standards, the National Council for the Social Studies asks that students be prepared to confront such questions as:

- What is civic participation and how can I be involved?
- How has the meaning of citizenship evolved?
- What is the balance between rights and responsibilities?
- What is the role of the citizen in the community, in the nation, and in the world community?
- How can I make a positive difference?

Being able to answer these questions enables students to become effective citizens, which is a major goal for social studies teachers, as well as for all school-related employees. Although teachers are expected to help students create a political belief system, the process of getting students to understand their own views is difficult. To conquer that dilemma, I have come across a few online political party quizzes that can help students create their political ideologies.
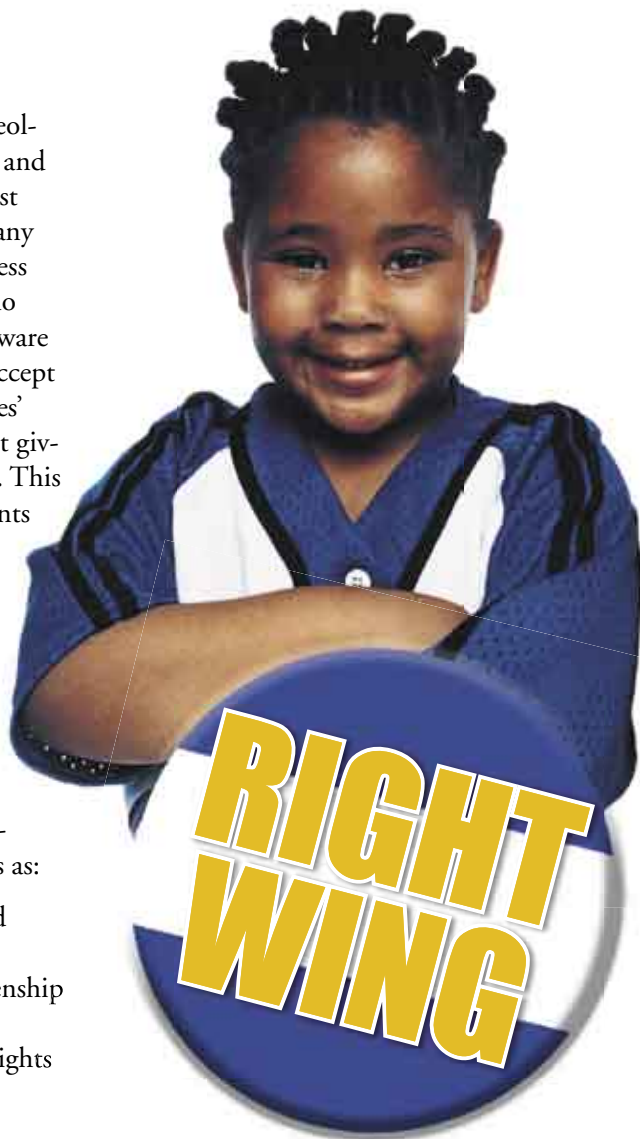
Web Sites

I have used these Web sites, and I found them appropriate for the classroom.

By William Russell

Subject: Political science

Grades: 9–12 (Ages 14–18)

Standards: *NETS•S* 3; *NETS•T* II (http://www.iste.org/standards/). *NCSS* Curriculum Standard V; Teacher Disciplinary Standard 3 (http://www.ncss.org/standards/).

Party Match Quiz of Party Platforms: http://www.govote.com

This quiz is sponsored by On The Issues, a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization devoted to providing information to voters so that candidates will be selected based on issues and not by popularity.

The Party Match Quiz offers detailed explanations for the different stances on a particular issue. Each question asked has a link to the explanation of the four different stances: strongly support, support, oppose, and strongly oppose. For example, a student taking a quiz can click out the question and receive an explanation of what each stance means.

The World's Smallest Political Quiz: http://www.self-gov.org
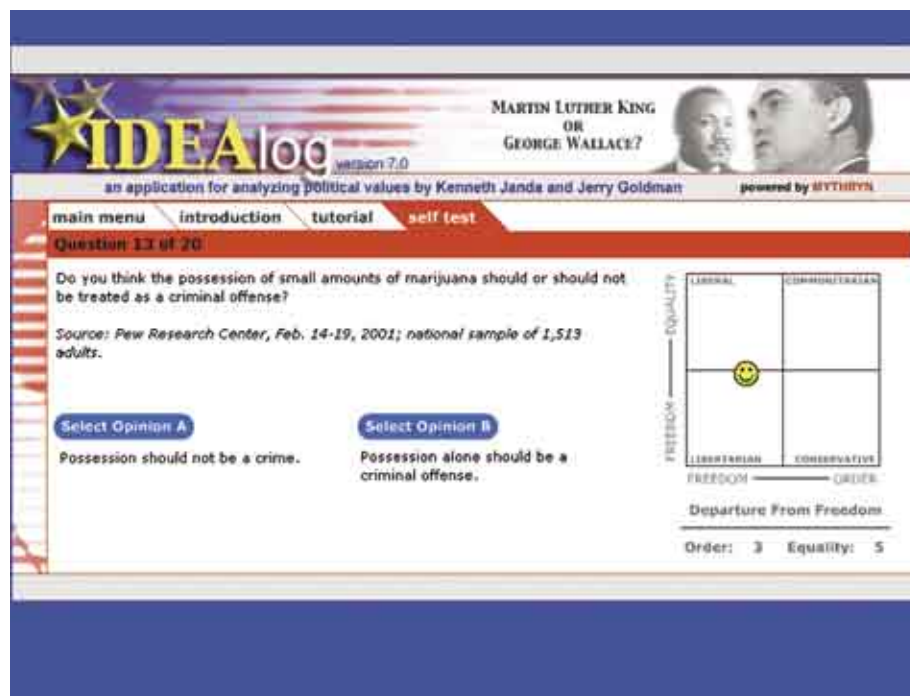
The World's Smallest Political Quiz (WSPQ) is sponsored by The Advocates for Self-Government, which

describes itself as a "non-profit educational organization dedicated to helping individuals encounter, evaluate and embrace the ideas of liberty."

The WSPQ allows students to answer questions with a simple yes, no, or maybe. The great part is that it does allow students to be undecided. After students complete the quiz, they receive a score. Rather than predicting a student's political party affiliation, the site predicts which political philosophy the student inhabits (centrist, libertarian, left liberal, right conservative, etc.). The WSPQ has been recognized and praised for its political measuring ability by such media outlets as *USA Today* and *The Washington Post.*

IDEALog: http://idealog.org/idealog.asp?ClassID

IDEALog is an online quiz applica-

the chances of Christmas Treeing as will keeping a rough timetable. You do not want to give a time limit, but you do want to know roughly how long an average student should take on a particular quiz. Students might not understand every question that is being asked, so it is up to them to seek help. If a student does ask for help, it is up to you to explain the question without expressing bias or influencing the student. The Party Match Quiz offers explanations for each question, which I have found to be tremendously helpful and on a reading level that secondary students can handle. The World's Smallest Political Quiz does not offer any help, but it does ask the questions in a simplistic manner. IDEALog does not offer any explanation of individual issues, but it does describe the views of the many political ideologies in the tutorial offered prior to the test.

Although the quizzes cover some political parties and philosophies, most do not cover many third parties. That can cause a great deal of inaccurate data, because the quizzes tend to focus on the most popular parties and philosophies.

Conclusion

The Web sites I discuss here will help students uncover their personal political party affiliation and ideology. Once students have discovered their political affiliation, eligible students can register to vote. Students can also use the information to create after-school clubs, for example, Young Democrats or Future Republicans. You could assign class debates on political issues or research projects that encompass the student's newly identified ideologies. Plus, this information could possibly increase the

tion for analyzing political values, created by Northwestern University political science professors Kenneth Janda and Jerry Goldman. IDEALog offers not only the quiz, but also an introduction and tutorial. The introduction is for new users, and describes the term *political ideology.* The tutorial then walks the student through the political spectrum from far left to far right. The tutorial gives each student a practice quiz to establish liberal and conservative understanding on individual issues. The quiz scores itself and places a student into one of four political ideologies: liberal, libertarian, communitarian, or conservative.

Process

I had each of my students complete the online quizzes offered from the above Web sites. First, I asked them to write down which political party affiliation they supported. Out of the 50 students who took the quizzes,

more than 30 supported political parties that contradicted their personal values and beliefs. By using these sites, I was able to help open my students' minds, allow them to make and establish personal values and beliefs, and choose a political party that matched those values without the influence of outside factors, such as a peer's or role model's political choices or preferences.

After saying that, I would like to point out a few concerns. Students are able to move through the quizzes at their own pace and can easily select random answers, perhaps to create an artisitic pattern. This is also known as *Christmas Treeing.* The most important thing you can do to prevent Christmas Treeing is to stress the importance of knowing and understanding one's political ideology. This will help students personalize the information and want to know more about where they stand politically. Closely monitoring the students will decrease

student participation in the Model United Nations, a yearly simulation that allows students to explore foreign policy and world government issues.

By using these resources, teachers will be able to help the students find a political party that matches their individual beliefs and values. Although these sites are all individually owned and operated, they seem to conclude with similar data. I am not saying that these sites should be a final authority for a student trying to understand and create a personal political ideology; however, I believe they can help a student by providing a basic outline of what an average supporter of a political party would believe. These Web sites allow a student to develop a basis for his or her beliefs by matching personal views on issues with political parties that share those same views. Once a basis is established, students can use their beliefs to create informed opinions and then act on them.

A student can act on their newfound ideology first and foremost by registering to vote. Students can also influence others to become politically active. They can volunteer for governmental programs. They can go to college to study political science or join a military branch because they want to serve their country. Plus, a student can stand up and fight for an issue he or she feels passionate about. This sort of political action will help a student understand the importance of teamwork, communication, and nonviolent demonstration. Becoming active and informed about political issues will help students be effective and efficient citizens.

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